St. Elmo Historic District
St. Elmo
Chaffee County
Colorado

HABS No. CO-72

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
ST. ELMO HISTORIC DISTRICT

Location:	Upper Chalk Creek Canyon in Chaffee County, Colorado, at an altitude of 10,012 feet. It is at the confluence of the north and south forks of Chalk Creek, approximately 2 1/2 miles due east of the Continental Divide. The Saguache Range of the Rocky Mountains bounds the creek.
Date of Construction:	1880-1917
Present Owner:	Multiple
Present Use:	Some buildings in St. Elmo are used as vacation homes and as commercial establishments catering to summer tourists; others are vacant.
Significance:	St. Elmo is unique for its vernacular wood frame and log architecture and its high degree of architectural integrity as a late 19th century Rocky Mountain mining town. Through its extant architecture, the contemporary observer can trace the creation, development, and decline of a typical mining community.
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ST. ELMO, COLORADO: CASE STUDY OF A ROCKY MOUNTAIN MINING TOWN

I. Historic Context and Significance

Colorado was the locus of the second great wave of settlement motivated by the quest for precious ore. During the first gold rush that swamped the pristine western frontier in 1848 and 1849, goldseekers skipped the Rockies and sought their fortunes in California. Most were disappointed in their quest and the initial exuberance gave way as larger corporate mining concerns replaced the lone placer miner in the mid 1850s. Suddenly and dramatically, hopes for the "main chance" were revived with reports of gold in the region of Pike's Peak. In the spring of 1859, a new mass migration estimated at about 100,000 people swept the Cherry Creek area near modern Denver. Some looked for gold while others sought their fortunes by grubstaking and providing urban services for the anxious prospectors. Many disappointed Fifty-niners turned back home, their dreams of wealth unrealized; others stayed to earn a livelihood in the budding hub of commerce at Denver; still others ventured farther West into the Rocky Mountains where new reports of strikes lured an increasing proportion of the tumultuous and optimistic mining population.

In the early 1870s prospectors began to arrive in the Chalk Creek Canyon. After a strike at Hortense in 1872, claim owners organized the Chalk Creek Mining District, inaugurating a rush to the area. Soon afterward in 1875, John Royal and Dr. A.E. Wright made a first claim at the site of the Mary Murphy Mine in upper Chalk Creek Canyon, and the mining camp of Alpine came into existence some 4 miles downstream.[1] In many ways Dr. Wright was representative

of the diverse talents and motivations that characterized migrants to the Rocky Mountain mines. A transplanted New York physician turned prospector, who arrived in the upper Arkansas Valley in 1871, he probably was Chalk Creek Canyon's first settler. In the years after his graduation from medical school in New York, Wright was more entrepreneur than healer of the sick. Working his way West to make his fortune, the young man spent several years as a store and sawmill proprietor in Iowa until the California gold rush lured him to the Far West in 1849. Still with little to show for his ventures, he traveled to Central America where he amassed a small fortune of $13,000 by various unknown pursuits. With that grubstake he again headed West, this time to the Pike's Peak region. By 1871, he had made his way to Chalk Creek where he and partner John Royal struck a vein of ore just south of the future site of St. Elmo. They soon sold the claim for $75,000, and Wright moved to Buena Vista, at last to practice his profession. Wright's claim became the Mary Murphy Mine, the most lucrative in the Chalk Creek district in the decade that followed. On the heels of the doctor's discovery, other prospectors staked claims, entrepreneurs from Kansas City built a smelting plant at Alpine, and the Denver, South Park and Pacific Railroad made plans to build a railway up Chalk Creek.

At about the time of the Royal and Wright strike, one of a number of Welshmen who would come to Chalk Creek Canyon arrived in the vicinity to set up shop. Griffith Evans opened his store at the confluence of the two forks of Chalk Creek in order to supply the prospectors expected to flood the area as news of the Mary Murphy strike spread. With his brother John Evans, and a rancher named Charles Seitz, who became the town's first postmaster, Griffith Evans proceeded to establish a settlement at the future townsite of St. Elmo. Thus, like hundreds of other fledgling western mining towns, St. Elmo was started by

a handful of hopeful entrepreneurs taking advantage of miners' luck. The town was officially incorporated in December 1880, almost a decade later.[2]

St. Elmo has the geographic characteristics common to Rocky Mountain mining towns: remoteness combined with a spectacular but rugged natural landscape. Located in upper Chalk Creek Canyon in Chaffee County, Colorado, it is nestled at the confluence of the north and south forks of Chalk Creek, about 2 1/2 miles due east of the Continental Divide. The mountains bounding the creek are part of the Saguache Range of the Rockies and the source of the minerals that attracted settlers. At an altitude of 10,012 feet, winters at the townsite are severe, lasting from November to June. Eager toll and railroad builders, miners and entrepreneurs at first ignored these climatic and geographic hardships, and created a distinct architectural legacy of their activity in the region. The record of their tenure in St. Elmo, and of subsequent settlers, remains in the surviving structures, buildings and town plan.

Unlike most 19th century hard-rock mining communities of the era whose original wooden structures were mostly destroyed by fire, replaced by masonry buildings, or lost through natural deterioration, much of the early vernacular wooden architecture of St. Elmo has survived. Its uniqueness as a historic site thus lies in the physical record it provides of the earliest architectural and planning stage of a small Rocky Mountain mining town. Through its extant architecture, the contemporary observer can trace the creation, development, and decline of a typical mountain mining community, as well as the socio-economic life of its inhabitants.

St. Elmo's historic significance is that it is a prototypical late 19th century

mining town in which much of the original architecture still survives. But it is architecturally unusual in another sense as well. Town builders compressed St. Elmo's architectural evolution into a single stage. By so doing, the builders departed from a typical frontier settlement pattern. Usually, prospectors first put up tents and fashioned crude leantos or dugouts. As more settlers poured into a new camp, it underwent a second stage of development. When it appeared that the mining boom was going to last for more than a few months, log cabins were raised. Soon entrepreneurs started sawmills to produce dimensioned dressed lumber, and carpenters began to erect wooden frame houses and commercial buildings. If the community was fortunate enough to be near or within a bonanza mining district, it soon succeeded to the final permanent phase when settlers constructed sophisticated masonry buildings and homes.[3]

At St. Elmo, the first two of these stages were compressed into one. Tents, log cabins, and wooden frame buildings appeared almost simultaneously. This compression of architectural phases was due to the town's proximity to a major transportation network. The area initially was settled for its mining potential, but also because it was at a transportation crossroads in the toll and railroad network spreading across the mining frontier. Unlike the earlier isolated communities of the 1860s and early 1870s, which struggled with inadequate transportation and communication, St. Elmo had access via the railroad to heavy planing machinery for a sawmill and machine-made building materials and hardware at its inception.[4] As a result, the log cabin requiring almost no finished materials or hardware, and frame building constructed of dressed lumber co-existed from the beginning.

An established transportation network stimulated rapid architectural

development and economic diversification much earlier at St. Elmo than in many mountain mining towns. But in other respects St. Elmo was quite typical of other mining communities of Colorado and the West in the late 1870s and early 1880s. First, it was an "instant town" whose fortunes were tied closely to the mining economy and transportation patterns of the vicinity. As a consequence, the community suffered the same boom and bust cycles of other such mining district communities.

It also was typical of the mining town prototype delineated by historian Duane A. Smith. Though its architecture remained primitive in contrast to the more sophisticated masonry construction undertaken by more prosperous Colorado towns such as Leadville, Aspen, and Central City, St. Elmo still embodied most of the characteristics Smith describes for other such communities. It was planned by a clearly identifiable group of entrepreneurs who directed its early growth. Its economy was sufficiently diversified to sustain its long-term survival as a center of commercial and social activity for the surrounding mines. It also served as a transportation crossroads to other mining districts. These characteristics enabled it to survive in spite of the cycles of depression that hit the mining economy of the district in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The longevity of its existence based on a diversified economy, social amenities and institutions, plus its appearance of architectural solidarity and planning outweigh the lack of masonry construction as evidence that St. Elmo is representative of the town type identified by Smith.[5] An overview of its historic and architectural development demonstrates the ways it is both typical and unique.

One of the early roads that started in Buena Vista provided the principal

access from eastern Colorado to the new mining camps of Chalk Creek, including St. Elmo. Stages and freighters traveled the Chalk Creek road regularly; the former provided passenger and mail service, and the latter the myriad of supplies demanded in the boom camps.[6] At St. Elmo the road from Buena Vista split into two stage and wagon routes. The Chalk Creek and Elk Mountain Toll Road, operated in 1880 by J.L. Sanderson and Company, ran west of St. Elmo along the north fork of Chalk Creek. It crossed the Continental Divide at Tin Cup Pass, proceeding to the gold mining camp of Tin Cup and the silver bonanza town of Aspen. In 1882 three St. Elmo men purchased the road, renaming it the St. Elmo, Tin Cup and Taylor River Toll Road. The Alpine Tunnel and South Park Toll Road, built by the South Park Railroad in 1880, ran along the west bank of the south fork of Chalk Creek up to the new mining camp of Hancock (about 6 miles south of St. Elmo). It crossed the Continental Divide at Williams Pass and descended along Middle Quartz Creek to the camp of Pitkin. From there it went to Gunnison, chief supply center for the "Gunnison Country" (later Gunnison County).[7] For a brief period from 1880 to 1882, most of the traffic from Denver to Aspen and Gunnison passed through St. Elmo along these toll roads.

Because it already was under construction to go to Gunnison, Colorado, the railroad came earlier in St. Elmo's development than to other towns in the upper Arkansas River Valley, such as the larger and more prosperous Leadville. The big silver rush at Leadville was in 1878, but the Rio Grande line did not reach the town until the end of 1880. By contrast, the Denver and South Park reached St. Elmo in January 1881, within months of the town's official founding. This line was formed in 1873 by a group of prominent Colorado businessmen in order to build a railroad from Denver to the "San Juan Country,"

a new mining area booming on the Western Slope of the Rocky Mountains south of Gunnison. After completing the road through much of the South Park region of Colorado, the railroad's management was deterred from its original purpose by Jay Gould, the Eastern stock market speculator. Gould purchased a half interest in both the South Park and its rival, the Denver and Rio Grande. He induced the two to sign a joint operating agreement in 1879. The agreement directed the South Park to build its road to the Gunnison region instead of San Juan, while the competing Rio Grande was to install a line up to the Arkansas Valley from Buena Vista to Leadville.[8]

The South Park engineers made surveys of several routes through the Saguache Range in 1879 and recommended that the road be built through Chalk Creek Canyon and along the south fork of the creek. They chose to bore the 1,700-foot-long Alpine Tunnel beneath Altman Pass and then follow Middle Quartz Creek on the Western Slope down to Pitkin and ultimately to Gunnison. Construction on the tunnel began in early 1880 and required over 2 years for completion. Meanwhile in the spring of 1880, the South Park extended the railroad from its rail head at Buena Vista. In the fall of that year the road reached the camp of Alpine, then the principal mining settlement in the Chalk Creek District. In January 1881 it advanced to St. Elmo, which had been established only one month before. In July the railroad reached the camp of Hancock in upper Chalk Creek Canyon. The first train to Gunnison finally made the trip in July 1882, amidst great fanfare in both Hancock and St. Elmo.[9]

II. Early St. Elmo Town Development

The official founding and planning of the town of St. Elmo occurred in 1880. In that year Evans and his associates laid claim to what they first called Forest City. Since that name already was in use in California, the U.S. Post Office requested another. Evans allegedly suggested the name St. Elmo after a contemporary novel he was reading at the time. In March 1880 the men contracted for an official survey to be made of the townsite boundaries by the U.S. Surveyor General's Office in Denver. The resulting plat, prepared in May 1880 by Deputy U. S. Surveyor Thomas J. Milner, illustrates the commercial advantage of the location in addition to the valuable ore in the area. Here two principal wagon and stage roads crossing the Continental Divide split, one leading to the boom town of Aspen, the other to Gunnison. For a merchant like Evans, the opportunities for a lucrative trade with westbound prospectors and entrepreneurs were obvious. Storekeepers would form the nucleus of the new community he envisioned. Prospectors, businessmen, merchants, and hundreds of employees of the South Park Railroad began arriving in Forest City during April and May 1880. Many squatted on lots in the new townsite, erecting tents and log dwellings. By September enough residents had arrived formally to organize the settlement, which Evans and others had renamed St. Elmo.

That spring Evans had hired C.L. Cornwell, a civil engineer from Pitkin, Colorado, to survey the site and design a town plan. The Cornwell plan called for an elongated town with the rough shape of an obtuse triangle. The western portion of the townsite was centered on the south fork of Chalk Creek, the eastern on the main stream west and as it ran east from the merging of its two tributaries. The practice of laying out a town to follow the course of a river

or creek down a gulch or canyon was an old one in Colorado mining camps. An early example was the 1863 plan of Central City, which also occurred at the confluence of two creeks. Unlike the Central City plan, in which the streets followed the undulating lines of the topography, the St. Elmo plan imposed a gridiron design of right-angled streets and rectangular blocks on the site. The result was at odds with both the course of the streams and the topography of the canyon. The serpentine creek flowed through many lots and obstructed all three streets running southwest. The sloping topography rendered many other lots useless.[10]

It also appears that Cornwell gave little study to the practical issues of how the boisterous population would circulate in and around town, or to future real estate sales. His plan is actually three plats awkwardly joined together: an east-west gridiron at the northeast, a north-south grid to the southwest, and a third grid running diagonally to act as a ridge between. This created crude junctures of the three sections. In the center of the southwest grid, an unnamed street abruptly narrows north of Fourth Street to the width of an alley at Third. An added inconvenience for real estate transactions was the fact that lots in the intermediate sections were irregular sizes. Many such lots would be unsaleable as single parcels. Both problems suggest Cornwell's inexperience in townsite planning and the haste with which he prepared the plat. As a consequence, town planners and owners of town property soon ignored the haphazard plan.

As St. Elmo developed, further discrepancies arose between the town plan and the actual layout of streets and building sites. Most of the streets in the southwest grid never materialized, indicating the failure of the town to reach

the size hoped for by its founders. Lanes were substituted for streets in the northeast grid, often running diagonally across blocks (e.g., Pitkin Avenue and Poplar Street). The town fathers, recognizing the futility of implementing the town plan, finally allowed buildings to be erected in street rights-of-way (e.g., Poplar and Pitkin), creating irregular building setbacks and roadways. The arrival of the railroad completed the disruption of the geometric town plan. From the Cornwell plan it appears that Evans and his partners intended Gunnison Avenue to be the town's principal thoroughfare along which east-west traffic would pass and a business district would develop. They expected Pitkin Avenue, following the route of the wagon and stage road to Altman (later Alpine) Pass, to become the principal street of the southwest gridiron.[11] Instead, most merchants located south of Chalk Creek on Main Street, just below the projected right-of-way of the railroad, and few commercial or residential buyers purchased lots along Pitkin. Augustus Helmer was one of the first victims of the abandonment of the original town plan. In partnership with St. Elmo's first mayor and another frontier doctor, Dr. George H. Simmons, Helmer built a 20- by 30-foot drugstore on the wrong side of the creek on Gunnison Avenue. To solve the marketing problem this created for Helmer's business, he apparently converted his store to a residence and rented Seitz's store on Main Street, with the post office in the rear, for his drug business.[12]

Though the hodgepodge settlement pattern diverged radically from the town plan, and structures were all simple log or frame styles, the immediate expectations of the town proprietors were rewarded. The unplanned and rapid development within town boundaries reflected the excitement of expectant merchants and their conviction that the town would prosper. This expectation was based on the belief that it was both the commercial and social center for the local

miners and an important transportation link in spanning the Continental Divide. Some 40 eligible male voters petitioned the Chaffee County Court for incorporation as a town. A redrawn version of Cornwell's layout was attached to the petition as the proposed town plan.[13] After an election in which the St. Elmo citizenry overwhelmingly voted to assume town status, the Court declared St. Elmo incorporated. In December the revised town plat was recorded at Buena Vista, the county seat.[14] In order to establish their rights as owners of the townsite, Griffith Evans and his six partners formed the St. Elmo Land and Improvement Company in November 1880, a month prior to official recording. In February 1881, the company filed a copy of the town plat at the U.S. Land Office in Leadville, Colorado, apparently to strengthen its claim. Evans and his associates then sold the blocks contained in the plat to the town government of St. Elmo, which became holder of the townsite. Squatting settlers purchased lots retroactively from the town, which applied for and finally received a patent to the site from the U.S. Government in 1882.[15] The patent confirmed the title of all property owners in St. Elmo, some 2 years after Evans' initial claim.

Together with the mining strikes made in the Chalk Creek District, the construction of the Denver and South Park Railroad created a population boom at the area. Some 350 to 450 men worked as laborers boring the Alpine Tunnel, living in work camps near the eastern portal. Supervising employees lived in either Hancock or St. Elmo.[16] Unusually severe winters the first 2 years of construction, with continuous snowstorms, resulted in an enormous labor turnover, adding to the transient nature of the population that sometimes caused uproar and excitement. A reporter for The Salida Mail observed on one weekend in November 1881 that: "A lot of railroaders came into town last

Sunday and got on a drunk. Quite a number of scuffles were indulged in, making things quite lively for a while."[17] Nevertheless, St. Elmo merchants greatly benefited from the turbulent labor force that came to work the railroad and the mines. For workers on the eastern side of the Continental Divide, St. Elmo was the nearest town not only for recreation but also for all kinds of services and supplies.

Merchants flocked to St. Elmo in response to the demand. The beef concession was particularly lucrative. The railroad contracted with Thomas Stark, a rancher from near Ramah, Colorado, to supply beef. Stark and his partners, W.S. Bates, Julian Gammon, and Reuben McCray, drove their cattle 150 miles to St. Elmo, arriving in June 1880. For the next 2 years they supplied beef to the camps at the tunnel and established a meat market in St. Elmo for sales to the mining companies and other large customers.[18] In 1880 St. Elmo residents looked forward to an epoch of great prosperity, due to the town's location at the center of prospecting and mining activity and at the junction of important transportation routes. Table 1 shows the diversity of enterprises underway by 1881 in the new camp.

TABLE 1. COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES IN ST. ELMO, 1881 [19]

	Type of Business	Number
1.	Hotels and boardinghouses	6
2.	Lumber dealers	3
3.	Meat markets	4
4.	Hardware	2
5.	Saloons or liquor dealers	8
6.	Billiard halls	3
7.	Builders or carpenters	2
8.	General stores	3
9.	Smelters	2
10.	Assayer	1
11.	Newspaper	1
12.	Physicians	2
13.	Druggist	1

14. Livery stables	2
15. Milliner	1
16. Tailoress	1
17. Blacksmith	1
18. Drayman	1
19. Real estate dealers	2
20. Attorney	1
21. Shoemakers	2
22. Restaurant	1
23. "Ladies Furnishings Goods"	1
24. Commission merchant	1
25. Methodist minister	1
Total	53 separate enterprises

The confidence inspired in local businessmen by the mining and railroad investments is evident not only in the extensive commercial listings, but in the specialization of services. In addition to the general store Griffith Evans first set up, there soon were hardware, drug, and "ladies furnishing goods" shops, a milliner, and a tailor. A professional class also appeared, consisting of engineers, assayer, physicians, attorney, newspaper editors, and an itinerant Methodist minister. The presence of a newspaper was an important sign of the town's stature and promised publicity and the boosting of civic identity and pride. As in any new community, lumber dealers were supplying construction lumber, carpenters were erecting the growing number of buildings, and real estate agents were selling lots and selling or renting speculative houses or stores.

St. Elmo's merchants and carpenters were familiar with the commercial architecture of other Western towns as well as those they had left back East and in the Midwest. Griffith Evans, town founder and the proprietor of a large store, came to Colorado from Dodge City, the well-known Kansas cattle town, and most likely was influenced by its urban architecture. Fred W. Brush, originally from New York, was a carpenter who erected Evans' building and several other prominent stores in 1880 and 1881. He had previously worked in

Leadville, the great silver bonanza town of central Colorado. There he built frame residences and doubtless observed many wooden commercial edifices under construction.[20] He arrived in St. Elmo when only three houses were there. While living in a tent outside of town, he constructed several of the main stores, including the Campbell, Raymond and Stahl hardware store, the Commercial Hotel, and stores for Griffith Evans. Brush and other carpenters probably were influenced by the architecture of other communities where they resided, but it is doubtful that they consciously modeled the buildings in St. Elmo on any particular style or plan. The commercial architecture of the town, like the residential, was a local vernacular that combined forms and details from a variety of sources.

After 1885 Fred Brush ran a drug and notion store, which also housed the post office, bought from A.C. Merrill. Brush held several town offices including town clerk, trustee, postmaster, and school board member. He was mayor until the fire of 1890, when he abandoned the charred remains of his store and headed for the real estate business in Salida.[21] Brush was far from unusual in his assumption of civic duties.

Food suppliers, butchers, restauranteurs, hotel and saloonkeepers, and a bevy of other entrepreneurs formed the core of the new community and served a vital function in addition to commerce. The merchants generally took responsibility for the governance and future development of the town. They filled town offices, through which they levied taxes, improved roads, built public utilities, and maintained law and order through ordinances such as one stating that a fine of several hundred dollars would be levied on "any person who shall keep a disorderly house or house of ill fame in town, or shall expose their

persons indecently on any street or alley. . . ."[22] Women of good reputation on the town board of trustees further enhanced the image sought by town boosters of an upstanding decent community that would be a sound investment for future developers.

Town merchants and professionals likewise assumed responsibility for organizing and governing the community from which they gained their livelihoods. This was a commonplace role for entrepreneurs throughout the Rocky Mountain mining towns. Historian Duane Smith emphasizes that it was the storekeeper who "realized that the greatest profit would be secured from a permanent, prosperous community, not from the fleeting fame of the rapid boom to bust mining cycle. It was to their advantage to promote law and order, schools, community improvements, and better means of transportation, for each of these would stimulate economic growth and thereby increase business."[23] Evans, Seitz, and Simmons were a few of the first town officers. The second mayor of the town was T.I. Briscoe, who had lived all his life in Chaffee County, working his way through college as a schoolteacher. The main two-story structure in the business section, the Briscoe Block, was named for him.

III. Architectural Development: 1880s

A. Commercial Architecture

The economic boom of 1880-84 attracted merchants to Main Street, where they erected a business district of finished commercial buildings typical of most western boom towns. The merchants defined the shape of their community and gave it the semblance of urbanity. They used a conventional formula familiar in the frontier West of wooden buildings with their gable ends masked by false fronts and clustered together on what had been established as the commercial

thoroughfare. Typically, a one- or two-story rectangular building had a gable roof, the end of which was oriented to the street. A rectangular facade obscured the gable and rose as a parapet, or false front, 4 to 5 feet above the roof. In the facade, large store windows generally flanked a double entrance with transom. If the building was two-story, two windows or pairs of windows appeared above the storefront.

Several of the first commercial buildings of St. Elmo were of log construction, but additions quickly gave them a more prosperous appearance. One-story commercial buildings were far more common than two-story structures in St. Elmo's business district. The Russell-Thorp Building (HABS No. CO-72-S) on West Main Street (c. 1880-81) represents the first style of commercial construction. Its walls are log and its facade is composed of rough pine vertical planks. On the north side of Main Street stands the Cash-Williams Building (c. 1881-85; HABS No. CO-72-L), exemplifying the next more elaborate construction phase, of balloon frame finished with horizontal wood siding.

For the two-story Briscoe Block, made up of multiple stores, the town's builders erected first a log frame bridged by three parallel gable roofs.[24] They then constructed a facade of horizontal siding with a parapet obscuring the gables. Pat Hurley's Saloon, which replaced the Ogden House Hotel in the late 1880s, followed the common storefront formula of the other buildings in all respects except the treatment of the false front. Rather than building a high rectangular parapet in front of the steeply-pitched gable roof, Hurley's carpenter created a semi-circular centerpiece in the parapet, an interesting variation seen elsewhere on the urban frontier as well.

The first wooden frame buildings were constructed of dimensioned unpainted planks from the sawmills, nailed together vertically. As the town grew during 1880 and 1881, the owners of commercial buildings began to add smoother horizontal siding to their rough plank facades. Most new buildings after the summer of 1880 were constructed with fronts of siding. The construction of the American House Hotel (HABS No. CO-72-K) by E. P. Whitney in 1880-81 illustrates this improvement. The original hotel on the northwest corner of First and Main Streets was erected in 1880 with vertical pine boards. One of the three hotels established in town within its first 6 months of existence, Whitney modestly advertised it as "the largest and best hotel in the mountains." Apparently this was quite an exaggeration. G. Thomas Ingham, a U.S. Deputy Mineral Surveyor, provided a more accurate description of St. Elmo's early hotel accommodations. Describing an unpleasant stay in one of the new hotels, he wrote:

> We reached Forest City about four o'clock, and put up at the best hotel the place could afford, which was, in fact, the only one, at three dollars per day. The hotel was a rude log house, recently constructed, and but half finished. Outside the cracks in logs were chinked and plastered, but inside [they were] only the bare logs, without ceiling or plaster of any sort. When we asked about a bed and a room by ourselves, the landlord told us the best he could do was to give us a bed and draw a chalk mark around us for a room.[25]

Apparently amenities soon improved. Less than 2 years later, an addition was made to the west side, and horizontal siding and box cornice were added to embellish the original section.[26]

B. Institutional Architecture

Two buildings have survived that best reflect the efforts of the entrepreneurial class to establish a permanent community. The Schoolhouse (HABS No. CO-72-Z) and Town Hall (HABS No. CO-72-M) were the centers of law,

order, and social life of the town. They are well preserved examples of typical institutional architecture seen in many small frontier towns of the American West. The 1882 Schoolhouse is like hundreds of other small schools erected during the 1870s and 1880s and more than any other town structure was the symbol of community life. In the East the first building in a new settlement was the church; but in the West, where religious and ethnic pluralism worked against the church focus, the schoolhouse was often the first structure raised in a new community. It represented both a communal effort in town building and belief that the new community had solidity and a future.

Choosing the site for the school was of primary importance. A prominent 19th century school plan book advised that a school "should overlook a delightful country, present a choice of sunshine and shade, or trees and flowers, and be sheltered from the prevailing winds of winter by a hill-top."[27] The St. Elmo school still is located in just such an idyllic setting, slightly elevated above the rest of the town on the edge of a wooded grove.

Simplicity of design and materials characterized most late 19th century rural and small town schools. The St. Elmo school, though larger and more imposing on its elevated perch, was similar in appearance to the frame houses in the town, with only a belfry to identify its community purpose. As the only distinguishing feature of many small town schools, the belfry or bell tower was considered a status symbol in fledgling communities. Borrowed from church design, this accoutrement also reflected the multipurpose use of most rural and small town schools. The school was used for social events and sometimes

doubled as a church meeting-house when itinerant ministers came to town. Classes held there were for the moral and educational uplift of the town's younger generation.[28]

Architecturally, both the Schoolhouse and the Town Hall in St. Elmo can be categorized as "mass vernacular." One architectural historian defines this as "identifiable primarily by the use of commercial machine-made materials" and the fact that "the design of mass vernacular is likely to 'look more like a schoolhouse' than a farm-building or home and to resemble other rural civic structures in the locale such as the town hall or church." Like the residential and commercial architecture in St. Elmo, the two institutional structures reflect the early accessibility of machine-made building material; their vernacular quality is in their design, not according to blueprints or an architect's rendering, but "according to a cultural template in the builder's mind as to what a schoolhouse or other cultural institution looks like."[29]

Constructed of vertical planks, which were later covered with horizontal siding (after 1894), the Schoolhouse is rectangular in plan and has a gable roof. The entrance is in the gable end; a belfry designates the building's function. The symmetrical placement of three windows on each of the side elevations suggests the use of a pattern book or manual by the carpenter involved. The original central stove and blackboards remain in the three-room interior.

The Town Hall on Main Street (1888), also embellished with a belfry, likewise follows a design similar to buildings of its type in other towns. The gable-roofed edifice is constructed of vertical boards. The facade on the north end borrows its design from the commercial formula. Large windows flank a double

entrance with transom. Horizontal siding is applied only to the front elevation. Like the Schoolhouse, a belfry above the north gable proclaims the Hall's civic function.

C. Domestic Architecture

St. Elmo's entrepreneurs were also its first residents, and their domestic structures were built simultaneously with the commercial and institutional. Early residents of frontier mining towns had to use available materials for construction, upgrading their simple structures as they could afford to and when different and more sophisticated material was freighted in by road or rail. Due to the early appearance of the rail line in the Chalk Creek District, however, and of the Campbell and Lowe sawmill, a small number of wooden balloon frame buildings appeared simultaneously with log cabins to characterize St. Elmo's initial residential architecture. The sawmills made frame buildings possible from mid-1880. Nevertheless, it appears that few frame houses were erected during the first years of construction. One of the only surviving frame houses from the early 1880s is the west wing of the McKinney-Hellman House (HABS No. CO-72-X) on First Street. The front section of the present house was erected from dimensioned boards and battens (visible on north elevation) between 1882 and 1885. The gable end faces the street. The Anton Stark House (HABS No. CO-72-P) on West Main Street (c. 1883-1900) also was originally of board and batten construction. The longitudinal side of the rectangular house is oriented to the street and later was covered with siding to present a finished appearance.

Surviving log residential structures in St. Elmo, including Helmer's original structure on Gunnison, represent several common types of frontier cabins in plan, roof shape, and notching that appeared in other Colorado mining towns. Their simple features varied according to the builder's individual taste and resources, and included one and two-story heights, peeled and unpeeled logs, saddle notching, gable ends constructed of dressed vertical planks, and high-pitched gable roofs to aid in removal of the heavy mountain snows. The McKenzie-Ottoson House (HABS No. CO-72-B) on Poplar Street (c. 1885-90), for example, has peeled logs joined in saddle notches and mud plaster daubing. The facade is placed in a gable end, and the high-pitched gables themselves are composed of vertical, dimensioned planks.

Making a gable end the facade of the cabin was characteristic of the Anglo-Western log structure type which developed in the Plains east of the Rockies during the 1850s and 1860s. It was characterized in most locales by a rectangular, single pen plan, low-pitched, sodded gable roof, saddle or square notching, placement of the entrance on a gable end, a one-story height, and total log construction below the roof. Only one existing cabin at St. Elmo exhibits most of the characteristics of this type, the Ennis House (HABS No. CO-72-DD), also on Gunnison Avenue (c. 1885-90). It has a low-pitched roof and a gable end facing the street. It is of log construction on all elevations and originally may have had a sod-covered roof. Unlike the Anglo-Western model, however, the entrance is in a side elevation, and there is no evidence that the house was consciously designed on the Anglo-Western model.

Log cabins usually were built according to ideas owners brought with them from previous places where they had grown up and resided. In the new locale they built with whatever materials were available in an eclectic mixture of styles, not just one type. Remaining log structures in St. Elmo reflect this ad hoc nature of frontier architecture and the individual tastes of town residents. The Helmer-Savard House (c. 1885-88, HABS No. CO-72-EE), for example, is a one-story cabin with a high-pitched gable roof and dimensioned board and batten gables. The longitudinal side contains the entrance and is oriented to the street. Helmer used V-notching in the log portion of the building. The Clark-Wild-Carlen Duplex (c. 1885-89, HABS No. CO-72-SS) features a hipped roof over a rectangular single pen plan, with planked logs and square notching. No other cabin like the duplex survives, although another hipped roof log structure once stood southwest of it facing the toll road to Williams Pass.[30]

Another house that is unique among the remaining St. Elmo log buildings is the Whitney-Maine House (c. 1882-83, HABS No. CO-72-V). This more elaborate structure illustrates the way the new migrants to an area might bring a variety of architectural styles and techniques based on recollections of former domiciles. Rare among St. Elmo residences, the two-story house boasts wooden shingles on its two gables. A central gable emerges from the slope of the roof on the facade, much in the manner of Carpenter Gothic houses of the 1850s in the Midwest. Both features are borrowings from high style architecture found in pattern books or builder's manuals. The elaborateness of the house perhaps reflected the personality and aspirations of its first owner E.P. Whitney, also proprietor of the touted American House Hotel.

IV. Socioeconomic Expansion and Decline: 1885-1910

A. Transportation and Mining

For the brief periods during which they successively served as rail heads, Alpine, St. Elmo, and Hancock enjoyed healthy prosperity. All traffic from the east decamped at the end of the railroad for nearby mines, the Alpine Tunnel or points west of the Continental Divide.[31] Workers, too, continued to pour in for years after completion of the line in order to keep the track and tunnel clear of snow and ice. The difficulty of keeping the train running under extreme weather hazards soon proved too much for the rail company, however. Trains constantly got stuck in snow slides and on icy rails, delaying passengers for several nights in St. Elmo as crews continuously battled with nature. A Buena Vista newspaper made the insulting observation that even a "blind man could see" that the Denver and South Park would never permanently settle for the "insignificant mountain hamlet" as the terminus for the Aspen freight traffic." The "beautiful growing city" of Buena Vista would soon be recognized as a much more favorable route. For the time being, however, St. Elmo received a large proportion of business, not only from the railroad, but from a daily stop by the Aspen Stage that came "loaded down" every afternoon.[32]

Once the railroad opened service to Gunnison, St. Elmo became the principal station in Chalk Creek. Since Tin Cup and Aspen remained without rail service, St. Elmo's location at the east end of the St. Elmo-Aspen Toll Road also served it well. By the mid 1880s the South Park Railroad had acquired control of the toll road and created a coordinated schedule. Rail passengers bound for Aspen alighted in the morning at St. Elmo, took breakfast there, and changed to a stagecoach, arriving in Aspen the evening of the same day.[33] But railroad

traffic through St. Elmo quickly decreased. The rival Denver and Rio Grande completed its own road to Gunnison in 1881 via the lower Marshall Pass to the south. In addition, Gunnison's boom ended in the early 1880's, dashing the expectations of both railroads for profitable operations. The South Park soon found the task of keeping the Alpine Tunnel open during the severe winters expensive and difficult. As a stopping point for westbound traffic by road, St. Elmo also lost ground steadily after 1885 as more direct roads to Aspen were built to the north, first through Cottonwood and then Independence Passes. St. Elmo's importance as a supply point for the Western Slope diminished to providing goods to Tin Cup.

After bankruptcy and reorganization in 1889, the railroad gave up service to Gunnison altogether in 1890. As a result of the failure of the Denver-Gunnison route, the railroad came to depend on the freight business provided by a few large mines to sustain its Chalk Creek branch. The Colorado and Southern Railroad, successor to the South Park, resumed traffic through the Alpine Tunnel in 1895. This principally was to attract the scenic excursion trade. After 1900 the Colorado and Southern Railroad derived most of its revenue from hauling the concentrated ore produced by the Mary Murphy Mine, largest in the Chalk Creek District. Final closing of the Alpine Tunnel came in 1910 as operating expenses again rose.[34]

Mining was even more fundamental to St. Elmo's continued existence than railroading activity. Gold and silver ore was the magnet that originally attracted prospectors and miners, townsite promoters, merchants, freighters, and the management of the South Park railroad. General William Palmer, president of the Denver and Rio Grande, confirmed the attraction for rail

companies. "A Population engaged in mining is by far the most profitable of any to a railway," he claimed.[35] At first, prospectors and small mine operators predominated in the vicinity. The 1880 census for Forest City showed prospectors as the single largest occupation group, outnumbering miners (either owners of mines or employees of a mining company) 21 to 17. The 1883 Colorado Mining Directory listed over 90 mines in the Chalk Creek District, nearly all of which were owned by partnerships of local men.[36] Soon, however, it was evident that mining in the Chalk Creek District was an expensive operation. Very little free gold existed to be recovered through placer mining. Gold occurred in veins of galena and sphalerite rock and had to be extracted by complicated and arduous techniques of lode or "hard-rock" mining. Chalk Creek ore also was mostly a low grade ore, which required both benefaction of the ore through milling into a concentrate and then smelting transforming the concentrate into a pure state. High freight, smelting, and milling charges made it difficult to make a profit.[37]

The low grade of the canyon's ore and the difficulties of extracting it favored the survival of large mining enterprises. Only companies with sufficient capital to develop the mines and provide for local milling prospered. Mining activity in the Chalk Creek district followed a traditional historic pattern of placer to hard-rock mining and rapid replacement of the lone prospector by large corporate production. Large scale corporate mining development and production in upper Chalk Creek began as early as 1880. In that year Wright and Royal sold their claim to a group of St. Louis investors, who later incorporated as the Mary Murphy Mining Company, headquartered in St. Louis and capitalized at $300,000.[38] The Mary Murphy claim proved to be the single bonanza of the district.

Within a year of purchase by the St. Louis firm, the Mary Murphy Mine was the largest ore producer in the district, yielding 75 to 100 tons daily, and the company had embarked on an ambitious development program. In 1880 the mine's superintendent John H. Kelly built the road to Alpine, then the district's rail head, for temporary shipment of ore. In 1881, when the South Park Railroad arrived at Pomeroy Gulch, the Murphy Company constructed a siding for shipping operations at Murphy's Switch. Four tunnels or levels were excavated to the main vein, and four connecting shafts were sunk. A mile-long tramway was erected between the shaft houses of the mine and the siding below. Ore from the tram buckets could be dumped either in waiting railcars or into bins beside the track. At first the company sent its ore to be concentrated and smelted at the Alpine and Iron City Smelters just east of St. Elmo. With the completion of its own mill, the company concentrated ore at Murphy's Switch and then shipped the concentrate to smelters in Leadville or Denver.[39]

B. Existing Mining and Milling Ruins

Physical evidence of the mining activity in Upper Chalk Creek still abounds around St. Elmo. Probably over 100 shaft openings and tailings (dumps) dot the mountain, sides of the canyon, and nearby gulches. On Murphy Mountain, shaft houses of the Mary Murphy Mine (HAER No. CO-26) may be seen above the timberline. At one of the lower levels of the mine are found the boardinghouse, ruins of miners' cabins, and the combined sorting mill and tramway house.

Less than a mile north of Romley are the ruins of the milling operations of the Mary Murphy Gold Mining Company. On the hillside below the former railroad right-of-way are the concrete foundations of the main mill, erected in 1912-13, in which the company installed the latest "flotation and static separation" machinery for concentrating the ore.[40] A small section of the mill buildings still stands at the east end. Below, on the south side of the upper fork of Chalk Creek, are immense deposits of silt and discarded minerals, the residue of the milling operation. The corridors and many of the wooden towers of the two aerial tramways leading down from the upper levels of the Murphy mine may be seen on the side of Chrysolite Mountain above the old railroad right-of-way. There also are remains of the Iron Chest Mine on the north side of Murphy Mountain. The shaft house, boardinghouse, and remains of a mill survive above the timberline about 3 miles southwest of St. Elmo.

At St. Elmo itself, several ruins associated with milling remain. The presumed remains of the Pat Murphy Mining Company mill, erected in the 1890s, are found in the southern portion of the townsite on the west bank of the south fork of Chalk Creek. At the east end of Main Street stand the stables and blacksmith shop of the Pawnee Mining and Milling Company (HABS No. CO-72-A). The Pawnee stamp mill, erected about 1892, adjoined the stable building to the north. The ore wagon road and scales may be found above the stable and mill site. The Pawnee Mill owners concentrated ore under contract to several companies.[41]

Just east of the townsite, on the south side of County Road 162, the ruins of the Paramount Mill (HAER No. CO-23) dominate the hillside. The concrete footings for the milling machinery and the wooden floors remain on four

terraces in the hillside. The mill, erected about 1910, was also a custom operation, undertaking ore reduction for multilple mining concerns. Below the Paramount was the plant of the St. Elmo Mining, Milling and Cyaniding Company. The Jeffrey cyanide plant had appeared on the site in the mid-1890s in response to the development of the new cyanide process, which increased gold production. The St. Elmo Cyaniding Company's concrete facility replaced the wooden one.[42] Built sometime after 1904, the St. Elmo plant today consists only of poured concrete foundations installed on the south side of the creek to support cyanide processing vats. Remains of a dam are found immediately to the west.

Large mining concerns other than the Mary Murphy also developed claims on Murphy Mountain and its neighbor to the north, Chrysolite Mountain. The owners of the Mollie and Pioneer near the Mary Murphy Mine, and those of the Iron Chest on the north side of Murphy Mountain, all sought Eastern capital for development beginning in 1880.[43] For example, the Pat Murphy Mining Company, a second St. Louis concern, was incorporated in 1881 to develop the Iron Chest Mine, probably the second richest claim in the vicinity. During the next two decades, the company sank a 300-foot tunnel with connecting shafts to the vein and erected a shaft house, office and blacksmith's shop, boardinghouse, and small mill at the mine. An ore road descended some 2 1/2 miles to St. Elmo.[44] At Romley, the Mary Murphy company town, foundations of the mining office, assay office, railroad depot, and the boardinghouses remain. By the mid-1880s, the Mary Murphy employed over 100 men. At the timberline, the company erected a boardinghouse for 60 men. At Murphy's Switch, the company's general office, assay office, and boardinghouses and cabins for 40 additional miners were constructed.[45]

C. Social Conditions and Long Economic Decline

In most Rocky Mountain mining camps, less than one percent of the men working the mines were owners who made a profit. The rest were hired hands who lived and worked under less than satisfactory conditions. Dynamite was in constant use, and most injuries and fatalities were caused by accidental explosions and falls into mine shafts, mostly to young and inexperienced miners. Though the Mary Murphy had a doctor in residence, smaller operations did not; and even at the Mary Murphy seriously injured workers had to be evacuated long and hard distances to Salida or Buena Vista.[46] Release from long hours, ever-present danger of an accident, and hard work was mostly through drinking and gambling. But the companionship among the predominantly Scotch, Irish, and Welsh work crews was reportedly congenial. Each bunkhouse had about 30 rooms with four men to a room who might while away the evenings with Highland, Gaelic and English folk music played on simple instruments. Many of the men had left their families behind to work the mines, and women in the vicinity were scarce with the exception of a few bold females came to work waiting tables at the Mary Murphy boardinghouse. Despite occasional camraderie among male workers, the miners' lives were melancholy and lonely. As one described it:

> It was lonesome as death far up on the Mary Murphy Silver mine, the only sound being heard was the almost constant thumping of the persistent winds on the bunkhouse and shaft shed with an occasional dim, low echo of the whistles of the monster engines [the Denver and South Park] away near the top of the mountain at the Alpine Tunnel.[47]

Most contemporary reports indicate that loneliness, hard work, and physical danger were the predominant features of life in the mines. In 1887 a newspaper in Leadville, a town plagued itself by strikes by disgruntled miners, printed an attack on poor sanitary conditions at the Mary Murphy boardinghouse. In defense of the company the mine superintendent objected, claiming conditions were "above average" and that only seven men had died of contagious diseases in

6 years and only one from an explosion. The doctor employed at the mine said he had examined all of the workers and found them to be "an exceptionally healthy body of men."[48]

The vagaries of the mining economy were perhaps more a danger to the welfare of the mine crews than were living conditions. After 1880 the mines around St. Elmo experienced the same boom and decline cycle as other districts in Colorado. The initial boom, brought on by silver and gold strikes throughout Chalk Creek Canyon and by mine development, lasted less than 5 years. High railroad freight rates caused the Mary Murphy to suspend shipping for nearly a year in 1882, and a general slump in mining production in the St. Elmo section occurred during 1885. Simultaneously the Gunnison County railroad business boom ended.[49]

When the boom ended, prospectors began to depart for new strikes, and mineral production in the district declined dramatically. St. Elmo had reached its commercial peak in 1881. Thereafter, the Colorado State Business Directory showed a gradual decline in number of business listings, from 53 in 1881 to 36 in 1884.[50] By 1885 business expansion had abruptly ended, as table 2 shows.

TABLE 2. COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES IN ST. ELMO, 1885 [51]

	Type of Business	Number	
1.	Hotels	3	(1 not listed)
2.	Meat market	1	
3.	Hardware	1	
4.	Saloons, liquor dealers	3	
5.	General stores	2	
6.	Assayer	1	
7.	Newspaper	1	
8.	Physician	1	
9.	Druggists	2	
10.	Shoemakers	2	

11. Attorney	1
12. Bank	1
Total	19

The variety of businesses was cut in half, and the number of listings had dropped by 40 percent. One reason was the decline in mining production during 1885; another was the closing of businesses tied to construction of the railroad and Alpine Tunnel completion. Hotels, meat markets, saloons, and billiard parlors had all derived a large part of their income from supplying food or services to laborers and other employees of the railroad. From 21 enterprises in these four categories in 1881, the number fell to seven in 1885.

The drastic drop in the number of St. Elmo's businesses deprived the camp of its newspaper. Howard Russell, who had founded the St. Elmo Mountaineer in the summer of 1880, finally gave up and moved to a more promising locale. In his final issue, he told fellow St. Elmo residents:

> For over five years we have lived, and part of the time prospered, among you; but circumstances will not admit of our sojourning longer. The newspaper business in this country, like others, must have a good, substantial, paying business in order to prosper and furnish its readers with good and reliable reading matter.[52]

But St. Elmo entrepreneurs were not yet defeated. With the resumption of mining production in 1886, St. Elmo's commerce stabilized, and the camp enjoyed an economic recovery. Table 3 shows the situation in early 1890.

TABLE 3. COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES IN ST. ELMO, 1890 [53]

	Type of Business	Number
1.	Hotel and boardinghouses	3 (1 not listed)
2.	Lumber dealer	1
3.	Meat market	1
4.	Hardware	1
5.	Saloons and liquor dealers	2
6.	General stores	3
7.	Newspaper	1

8. Physician	1
9. Druggist	1
10. Livery	1
11. Blacksmith	1
12. Shoemakers	2
13. Drayman/express	1
14. Attorneys	2
15. Barber	1
16. Railway agent	1
17. Mining company office	1
18. Opera house	1
19. Bakery	1
20. Jeweler	1
Total	27

Businesses had diversified again to 20 categories, including several new listings--a jeweler, mining offices, and a bakery. A return of confidence in the camp's future was illustrated also by the appearance of another newspaper and in the opening of a small "opera house" indicative of "refined civilization" on the mining frontier. Nevertheless, the downhill slide was persistent. The price of silver, declining since 1873, plummeted during the late 1880s and drastically undercut mining profits. Chalk Creek silver mining came to a halt when the nation was hit in 1893 with the worst economic depression it had experienced and with the repeal of the Sherman Silver Act, which provided for the Federal purchase of silver. The lack of high grade ore in the district and the severe winters further discouraged the owners of many small mining operations, causing them to give up production by the mid-1890s.[54]

Then again district miners made a comeback. In 1895 several mines again began to mine ore with a profitable gold content. Colonel B.F. Morley of the Golf Mining and Milling Company leased the Murphy property in the late 1890 and erected a smelter in Buena Vista to process the concentrated ore. Morley's intention was to restore profitability to the Murphy operation by reducing high

freight and smelting costs. Though the new arrangement continued until 1903, apparently profits did not meet the expectations of the Golf company, and it suspended mining and smelting operations in 1904.[55]

Meanwhile, four of the other principal mining companies in upper Chalk Creek Canyon merged their firms in 1902 to create the St. Elmo Consolidated Mines Company. The new concern owned 21 claims in Murphy and Pomeroy Mountains, including the Iron Chest, the Independence, and the Red Raven. Through pooling the combined resources of the former owners, the St. Elmo Consolidated Mines Company planned to develop fully the Iron Chest Mine. The company planned to tap a deep tunnel to the mine's chief vein and construct a large new concentration mill, possibly on company land in St. Elmo. Despite a glowing outlook presented in the firm's prospectus, the St. Elmo Consolidated Mines Company apparently was unable to attract adequate capital. Few of the ambitious features of the project were carried out. By 1909 no large mine was in operation in the Upper Chalk Creek area.[56]

Additional grave blows during the decade of 1890 to 1900 crippled the commercial trade of St. Elmo. A great fire in April 1890 destroyed most of the business district on East Main Street. The principal business houses of the town--the Clifton Hotel, W.S. Raymond's Hardware Store, Helmer's Drugstore, J.D. Criss' General Store, Brush's Drugstore and Post Office, and Omland's Saloon and Opera House--were swept away by the fire. Only the presence of a stone fire wall on the east side of Whittenberger's General Store, formerly owned by Griffith Evans, prevented the blaze from consuming the rest of the town south of Chalk Creek. Evans was the only resident with the foresight to protect his establishment with a wall. It provided protection from the

boisterous saloon next door as well as from fire. The buildings destroyed had been erected in the flush period of the initial boom. Most of the discouraged proprietors left the camp, unwilling to rebuild in a camp with an uncertain future.[57] Only a few merchants rebuilt, chiefly on the north side of the street. The 1891 State Business Directory listed only 13 enterprises. Commerce received another blow in 1890, when the South Park Railroad decided to close the Alpine Tunnel and stop through rail traffic to Pitkin and Gunnison.[58]

One of the few buildings erected after the fire was the two-story St. Elmo Mercantile Company Building (1892-93, HABS No. CO-72-H). The builder continued the use of the false front formula of two decades earlier. Even the brackets associated with Italianate buildings of the 1870s were retained. Another late one-story building, Hellman's Miner's Exchange (c. 1908, HABS No. CO-72-F) stands just to the east of the Mercantile Company Building. Again the 1880 design type was followed with few deviations other than the widening of the proportions of the facade.

Some recovery occurred in 1895, after the Colorado and Southern Railroad resumed service to the Western Slope and several mines turned from silver to gold production.[59] In 1898 the stores that had been spared on the south side of Main in 1890 were now destroyed by another fire.[60] J.M. Whittenberger and the other owners of burned-out stores departed. By 1900 St. Elmo had a one-industry economy, offering subsistence income to a handful of businesses. Table 4 shows the effect of a decade of setbacks on St. Elmo's commerce.

TABLE 4: COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES IN ST. ELMO, 1900 [61]

	Type of Business	Number
1.	Hotel/boardinghouse	1
2.	Meat market	1
3.	Saloon	1
4.	General store	1
5.	Shoemaker	1
6.	Expressman-drayman	1
7.	Stamp mill	1
8.	Tailor	1
	Total	8

The number of businesses had descended to a level that supplied only basic needs of the town. The remaining business proprietors had resigned themselves by 1900 to serving a static community with little hope of growth. There was only one business operating in each category of enterprise; not enough trade existed to support competitors. St. Elmo had become a one-industry village. The residents were the few miners still employed by the mining companies; few people remained who were not directly dependent on mining.[62]

Then miraculously again the economy revived. A new era opened for the Mary Murphy mine in May 1909. An English financial syndicate purchased the properties of the St. Louis company. With plenty of investment capital on hand, the Mary Murphy Gold Mining Company was incorporated. The new owners poured $300,000 into a systematic excavation program to reach untapped sections of the Murphy veins. The 5,000-foot-deep Golf Tunnel was excavated. In addition, a large new mill was erected on a site between St. Elmo and the company town of Romley (formerly Murphy's Switch).[63] New tramways were built from two of the upper levels of the mine to the mill. By 1913 the improvements were complete, and the Mary Murphy launched into its greatest period of production. From the low point of production in 1909, the mine reached a peak of 60,588 tons of ore yielded in 1915.[64]

The upswing in St. Elmo's economy that occurred in 1909 meant increased business in St. Elmo during construction of improvements and additional trade from the extra miners hired afterward. Business improved enough to support two hotels, saloons, and general stores. One of the saloonkeepers, Charles Hellman, also ran the Miner's Exchange, cashing miner's paychecks.[65] But though business improved between 1909 and 1916, there was no boom. The variety of businesses remained unchanged, and the upswing in the town's fortunes depended almost totally on the Mary Murphy Mine production. In the decade from 1910 to 1920, the other mines in Upper Chalk Creek produced negligible quantities of ore. For example, the Iron Chest Mine yielded a combined total of only 442 tons of ore between 1913 and 1915.[66] During St. Elmo's final years as a mining camp, the Mary Murphy alone carried on significant mining production.

V. Final Decline: 1910-

During World War I, English investors in American mines were involved with the international conflict instead of mining, and production declined. Following the war, silver market prices plummeted and the Murphy company rapidly reduced operations. When the Murphy management shut down operations gradually between 1919 and 1922, the town's handful of businesses waited for mining to resume as it had before.[67] But then in 1926 the Colorado and Southern Railroad thwarted any possibility of revival when, after finally receiving permission from the U.S. Federal Government Supreme Court, it abandoned its Chalk Creek branch. During the remainder of the 1920s, the remaining mines of the district closed one by one. Their owners realized the impossibility of profitable production without rail service and relatively cheap rail freight rates.[68]

The effect on St. Elmo of the railroad's abandonment was instantaneous. The miners departed, leaving the town nearly vacant. Only a few long-time residents, such as Mayor Daniel Clark, saloonkeeper Patrick Hurley, and the Stark family, hung on and hoped for a rebirth of the community.[69] Deprived of its economic base, St. Elmo lapsed into "ghost town" status, even as Mrs. Anna Stark and her sons Roy and Anthony doggedly sought new business. Roy A. Stark realized the potential of Upper Chalk Creek for tourism and recreation as early as 1912. With S.L. Taber and Fred Shodl, he formed the St. Elmo Board of Trade to "promote the interests and prosperity of the . . . town of St. Elmo and . . . County of Chaffee, by advertising their resources and their scenic and climatic attractions." After the miners left, the Stark family began to acquire the abandoned houses and turn them into rental cabins for tourists and fishermen. Roy Stark indefatigably promoted the town's attractions through press releases.[70] The family's general store, combining store, post office, telegraph desk, boardinghouse, and cabin rental agency into a single operation, became the focus of St. Elmo's identity.[71] Through the Stark family's efforts, most of the buildings in St. Elmo survived, avoiding the fate of Alpine, Romley, Hancock, and the other disintegrating mining communities in the Chalk Creek district.

St. Elmo never enjoyed a sufficient volume of mining production to graduate from wooden to more sophisticated masonry architecture. Its remote location made attraction of industries unrelated to mining unlikely. Its demise illustrates a generality about small mining communities made by Duane Smith. "Mining is self-liquidating," he observes. "On only a few occasions did a district [and its supporting communities] last for more than a generation."[72]

The initial boom in Upper Chalk Creek lasted for less than 5 years. There were no bonanzas. The ore was low grade and expensive to concentrate and smelt. St. Elmo became dependent on the vagaries of production of a few large mines. When the largest mine, the Mary Murphy, shut down 40 years after the first strike and the rail line was abandoned, St. Elmo's existence as an active community faded out.

Even by 1893, with the great silver crash and national depression, the town's golden years were over in little more than a decade of its founding. Though it managed to survive through the 1920s, largely due to the efforts of the Stark family, St. Elmo had a population of only 37 in 1920, and seven in 1930.[73] The relentless boom and bust mining cycles had progressively whittled away its economic fabric. The abandonment of the Denver and South Park Railroad line in 1926 was the final of many blows to its status as a transportation crossroads. With both economic and demographic props knocked from under its foundations, St. Elmo ceased to exist as a viable town. The physical remains of its beginnings and lifespan, however, were frozen in time as a unique historical record of a first-generation Rocky Mountain mining town.

ENDNOTES

[1]History of the Arkansas Valley, Colorado (Chicago: O.L. Baskin and Co., Historical Publishers, 1881), 494-495; Louisa A. Ward, Chalk Creek, Colorado, The Old West Series of Pamphlets, No. 9 (Denver: John VanMale, Publisher, 1940), map, 124-125.

[2]Peter Anderson, From Gold to Ghosts: A History of St. Elmo, Colorado (Gunnison, Colorado: B and B Printers, Gunnison, Inc., 1983), 1-5; Helmers, 18-22.

[3]Muriel S. Wolle, "Early Mining Camp Architecture," The Denver Westerner's 1953 Brand Book, IX (Denver: The Westerner's Posse, 1954), 187; The succession of mining camp development to town status is also traced by Duane A. Smith, Rocky Mountain Mining Camps (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967) and C. Eric Stoehr, Bonanza Victorian: Architecture and Society in Colorado Mining Towns (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975).

[4]See Mac C. Poor, Denver, South Park and Pacific (Denver: Rocky Mountain Railroad Club, 1949) for a discussion of railroad expansion in the late 1870s and early 1880s, 155-163, 200-209. William W. Campbell's sawmill site is shown on Cornwell's original Forest City plat of the spring of 1880; see C.L. Cornwell, Civil Engineer, "Map of Forest City Town Site, Chaffee County," filed February 24, 1881, Forest City file, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, Denver, Colorado. According to Elizabeth Stark Duncan, niece of James Lowe, one of the Lowe sons, Levi Lowe and his family arrived 2 years before the founding of St. Elmo and started their sawmill; Elizabeth S. Duncan, "St. Elmo," manuscript, p. 1, Elizabeth S. Duncan collection, Bennett, Colorado.

[5]Smith, Rocky Mountain Mining Camps.

[6]G. Thomas Ingham provided a vivid account of his 1880 ride on a stage from the tent city of Buena Vista to Forest City in Digging Gold Among the Rockies, or Exciting Adventures of Wild Camp Life in Leadville, Black Hills, and Gunnison Country (Philadelphia, Boston: Cottage Library Publishing House, 1886), 270-278.

[7]News item on Silas Nott, Rocky Mountain Herald, August 7, 1886, p. 4, c. 3; S.E. Poet, "The Story of Tin Cup, Colorado," Colorado Magazine, IX (January, 1932), 30-38; advertisement in Rocky Mountain News, October 3, 1880, cited in Poor, Denver, South Park and Pacific, 205; "Articles of Incorporation of the St. Elmo, Tin Cup and Taylor River Toll Road Company," dated June 16, 1882, Colorado State Archives, Denver; Dow Helmers, Historic Alpine Tunnel (Chicago: Sage Books, 1963, 1971), 21.

[8]For a detailed review of the South Park's decision to build to Gunnison, see Poor, Denver, South Park and Pacific, 155, 201-202; Helmers, 18-19.

[9]"Around St. Elmo," Rocky Mountain News, January 15, 1881, p. 3, c. 1; Helmers, map, p. 8, also 20-28, 61; Ward, 350.

[10]Thomas J. Milner, "Field Notes of the Outboundary Lines of the Town Site of Forrest [sic] City," May 17, 1880; Cornwell, "Map of Forest City Town Site, Chaffee County." The name came from the heavy forest of spruce and pine that had to be cut down before the town was built. Richard Evans (son of Griffith Evans), interviewed by Richard Carroll, "Interviews Collected During 1933-34 for the State Historical Society of Colorado by C.W.A. Workers," Pamphlet 346, 151-153, Colorado State Historical Society Library, Denver. For Central City, see John W. Reps, Cities of the American West (Princeton University Press, 1979), 464-468.

[11]C.L. Cornwell, "Map of St. Elmo Town Site," recorded December 27, 1880, Chaffee County Clerk and Recorder's Office, Salida, Colorado.

[12]Helmers, 210.

[13]For an account of life in Forest City in May 1880, see Ingham, 278-282; also Richard Carroll interview with Richard H. Evans, "Interviews Collected During 1933-34 for the State Historical Society of Colorado by C.W.A. Workers," Pamphlet 346, 151-153, Colorado State Historical Society.

[14]Plat of St. Elmo and Petition for Incorporation, dated September 4, 1880, in "Incorporation Records of Cities and Towns," Secretary of State Records, Microfilm Roll 20, Colorado State Archives, Denver; C.L. Cornwell, "Map of St. Elmo Town Site," recorded December 27, 1880, Chaffee County Clerk and Recorder's Office, Salida, Colorado.

[15]Cornwell, "Map of Forest City Town Site;" "Articles of Incorporation of the St. Elmo Land and Inprovement Company," dated November 19, 1880, Colorado State Archives, Denver; Abstract of Town Lot [transactions], Book 1, pp. 181, 183, Chaffee County Clerk and Recorder's Office, Salida, Colorado; Patent Certificate No. 630 — "St. Elmo," Patent Book 40, p. 72, Chaffee County Clerk and Recorder's Office, Salida, Colorado.

[16]Helmers, 24-26.

[17]November 27, 1881, quoted in Anderson, 36.

[18]Elizabeth Stark Duncan collection [daughter of Thomas Stark], "St. Elmo," typescript, n.p., n.d.; Transcript of taped interview with Elizabeth Stark Duncan by James Glass, July 3, 1984, Bennett, Colorado. The story of the meat contract is also recounted in June Shaputis and Suzanne Kelly (eds.), A History of Chaffee County (Buena Vista, Colorado: Buena Vista Heritage, 1982), 152.

[19]Taken from "St. Elmo" entry, Blake's Colorado State Business Directory, 1881 (Denver: J.A. Blake, 1882), 292-293. The listings in the state directories are not complete; several businesses were left out each year. Nevertheless, they do offer an indication of the "ebb and flow" of commerce from 1880 to 1926.

[20]Richard H. Evans interview by Richard Carroll, 151; Fred W. Brush interview by Richard Carroll, 33.

[21]See Fred W. Brush interviewed by Richard Carroll in "Interviews Collected During 1933-34 for the State Historical Society of Colorado by C.W.A. Workers," Pamphlet 345, 35, Colorado State Historical Society Library; Ward, 35.

[22]Printed in Buena Vista Herald, March 14, 1890, quoted in Peter Anderson, From Gold to Ghosts, 87.

[23]Smith, 60. This is also Anderson's thesis in his analysis of St. Elmo town development.

[24]See, for example, the building with multiple gables and false facade in the 1860s photograph of Central City's Main Street, in Duane A. Smith, Colorado Mining: A Photographic History (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977), 17. The three gables are clearly visible in an 1880s photograph of Chalk creek at St. Elmo, "St. Elmo" photograph file, Colorado State Historical Society Library.

[25]Quoted in Ward, 36.

[26]Transcript of interview with Elizabeth S. Duncan by James Glass. Duncan was granddaughter of E.P. Whitney.

[27]Henry Barnard, School Architecture: Or Contributions to the Improvement of School Houses in the United States (1838), quoted in Andrew Gulliford, America's Country Schools (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1984), 160-161.

[28]Anderson, 73.

[29]Fred E.H. Schroeder, "Schoolhouse Reading: What Can You Learn From Your Rural School," History News (April, 1981), quoted in Gulliford, 165.

[30]Mary Wilson, "The Rocky Mountain Cabin," in Log Cabin Studies, cultural Resources Report No. 9 (Ogden, Utah: USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region, 1984), 12-14. Also, historical photographs in the "St. Elmo" photograph files of the Western History Department, Denver Public Library, show this building. The interpretation of St. Elmo's early architecture is also based on the thesis of Harold Kirker, California's Architectural Frontier (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960), viii-ix. Kirker argues that isolated frontier societies exhibited a "cultural conservatism" and "accentuated customs brought with them at the time of immigration" that resulted in a colonial architecture rather than new frontier styles as the Turner Thesis would suggest. This interpretation differs also from Wilson's emphasis on the appearance of a new indigenous log cabin type called by some architectural historians an "Anglo-Western" type.

[31]Ward, 34. Alpine and Hancock boomed briefly in the early 1880s and then died as the railroad construction was completed and as the two camps lost residents to St. Elmo, with its superior location for commerce. For accounts of the existence of Alpine and Hancock, see Ward, 30-33, 44.

[32]Quoted in Anderson, 40.

[33]See news story on Silas Nott, Rocky Mountain Herald, August 7, 1886, p. 4, c. 3; Poet, 35-36; Helmers, 41.

[34]The St. Elmo Mountaineer voiced concern over the loss of the trade to the northern passes in its July 11, 1885, issue much of which is reproduced in Ward, 38-39; Poet, 36; Helmers, 19, 25-28, 49; Poor, 202; Anderson, 43-45. From the beginning, the mining companies considered cheap freight rates essential to a profitable operation. Hauling ore long distance in ore wagons was too expensive. See "Around St. Elmo," Rocky Mountain News, January 15, 1881, p. 3, c. 1. A comparison of the costs and revenues of the railroad with and without the Murphy mine in operation demonstrates the Colorado and Southern's dependency on the single mine. See Interstate Commerce Commission, Financial Docket #1572 (1922) cited in Anderson, 100, 116, 117.

[35]Quoted by Smith, 137.

[36]Robert A. Corregan and David F. Lingane, eds., Colorado Mining Directory: Containing an Accurate Description of the Mines, Mining Properties and Mills, and the Mining, Miling, Smelting, Reducing and Refining Companies and Corporations of Colorado (Denver: The Colorado Mining Directory Co., 1883), 83-114.

[37]Quentin L. Brewer, "The Geology and Ore Deposits of a Section in the Chalk Creek Mining District Chaffee County Colorado," (unpublished M.A. thesis, Colorado School of Mines, Golden, Colorado, 1931), 18-20, 24-25.

[38]Ward, 41; Colorado Mining Directory, 1881, 101.

[39]L.A. Kent, Chalk Creek: A Detailed Description of Chaffee County's Most Promising Mineral Districts, (Denver: Denver Republican, 1882), 13-15, refers to article on the burning of the ca. 1885 Murphy mill in the Chaffee County Republican, December 22, 1904. Cited in Anderson, 30; Ward, 41.

[40]"Mary Murphy Mine Named for Nurse," Denver Post, December 28, 1913.

[41]"Certificate of Incorporation of the Pawnee Mining and Milling Company," dated December 9, 1891, Colorado State Archives; Abstract of Town Lot [transactions], Book 1, p.184; article in Salida Mail, December 15, 1891. Cited in Anderson, 24. Researcher James Glass is indebted to Dennis Cyboron of Buena Vista for drawing his attention to the wagon scales. Anderson reports that the Pawnee at different points concentrated ore for the Tressa C., Mollie, and Mary Murphy Mines; see pp. 26-30.

[42]The name "Paramount Mill" is etched on a historical photograph of the mill in the collection of Mrs. Priscilla Hartman; C.S. Arthur, E.M., "Report on Rockslide Mining Claims," January 20, 1920, p. 6 and accompanying photographs of the "custom mill;" Typed manuscript in collection of Mrs. Charlotte Vickerson Merrifield, Buena Vista, Colorado; "Certificate of Incorporation, The St. Elmo Mining, Milling and Cyaniding Company," dated March 4, 1904, Colorado State Archives; Lacy Humbeutel, Nuggets From Chalk Creek (Colorado Springs: Century One Press, 1975), 42, 61. Anderson, 26-27.

[43]Kent, 16-17.

[44]"Certificate of Incorporation for the Mary Murphy Mining Company," dated May 11, 1881, in Incorporation Book 6, 519-520, Colorado State Archives. See analysis of mining engineer W.C. Marshall regarding the Iron Chest Mine in Prospectus of the St. Elmo Consolidated Mines Company (St. Elmo Consolidated Mines Company, 1903), 3, 7-10, 19.

[45]Muriel Wolle provides a description and a sketch of the buildings at Romley as they appeared in 1940, when most were still standing, in Stampede to the Timberline (Boulder: The University of Colorado Press, 1949), 154, 157.

[46]Smith, 199; Anderson, 56-57.

[47]Quoted in Anderson, 59.

[48]Ibid., 58; Buena Vista Democrat, September 8, 1887.

[49]Article in Buena Vista Democrat, July 8, 1885, cited by Anderson, 19.

[50]See "St. Elmo" entries, Colorado State Business Directory, 1882, 1883, 1884 (Denver: various publishers).

[51]Taken from Colorado State Business Directory, 1885 (Denver: James R. Ives and Co., 1885), 397-398.

[52]"Valedictory," St. Elmo Mountaineer, September 25, 1885, p. 1, c. 1. Only four issues of the Mountaineer survive, all at the Kansas State Historical Society Library, Topeka, Kansas.

[53]Taken from the "St. Elmo" entry, Colorado State Business Directory, 1890 (Denver: James R. Ives and Co., 1890), 475.

[54]Phyllis Flanders Dorset, The New Eldorado: The Story of Colorado's Gold and Silver Rushes (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1970), 336-337.

[55]See James Henry Morley 1824-1889: A Memorial (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1891), 56. "The Indications at St. Elmo," Denver Times, July 17, 1898, p. 3, c. 2. Production figures for the Mary Murphy Mine from 1901 to 1949 are found in McClelland G. Dings and Charles S. Robinson, "Geology and Ore Deposits of the Garfield Quadrangle, Colorado," U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 289 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1957), 100. A 75 percent decline in yield occurred between 1903 and 1904.

[56]Pomeroy is the next mountain south of Murphy Mountain. Prospectus of the St. Elmo Consolidated Mines Company, 4-5, 23, 34. According to production figures published in Dings and Robinson, the Iron Chest Mine, intended to be the centerpiece of the Consolidated Mines Company, yielded little ore between 1902 and 1913; see p. 98.

[57]"Big Fire at St. Elmo," Denver Republican, April 20, 1890, p. 1, c. 8. After seeing his drugstore and post office destroyed, Fred Brush resigned as mayor of St. Elmo and moved to Salida. Carroll interview with Fred Brush, 34-35.

[58]"St. Elmo" entry, Colorado State Business Directory, 1891 (Denver: James R. Ives and Co., 1891), 458.

[59]"St. Elmo" entry, Colorado State Business Directory, 1894, 1895, 1896 (Denver: various publishers).

[60]Article in Salida Mail, January 25, 1898, cited in Anderson, 93-94.

[61]See "St. Elmo" entry, Colorado State Business Directory, 1900 (Denver: The Gazeteer Publishing Co., 1900), 639.

[62]The 1900 manuscript census schedule for St. Elmo reveals that over a third of the 145 people enumerated were miners. The occupation with the next largest number was prospectors with eight. "Precinct 7 St. Elmo," Chaffee County, Colorado, Twelfth Census of the United States (1900), Volume 5, Colorado, 53A, 53B, 54A, 54B, Microfilm Roll 121, Federal Records and Archives Center, Denver.

[63]"Mary Murphy Mine Sold to a Rich English Syndicate," Denver Times, May 22, 1909, p. 1, c. 3; "Mary Murphy Mine Named for Nurse," Denver Post, December 28, 1913.

[64]Dings and Robinson, 100.

[65]"St. Elmo" entry, Colorado State Business Directory, 1909 (Denver: The Gazeteer Publishing Co., 1909), 1086; transcript of taped interview with Mrs. Charlotte Vickerson Merrifield by Jim Glass, July 10, 1984, Buena Vista, Colorado.

[66]The data collected by Dings and Robinson on the other principal mines of the Chalk Creek District indicates that few were worked after 1900; see pp. 101-104. See also the production table for the Iron Chest Mine, 1901-1915, p. 98.

[67]Transcript of Merrifield interview.

[68]Ward, 42; Anderson, 103-104. Also see the table of production figures in Dings and Robinson, 10.

[69]Transcript of Merrifield interview.

[70]"Articles of Incorporation of the St. Elmo Board of Trade," dated March 9, 1912, Colorado State Archives; transcript of Elizabeth Stark Duncan interview.

[71]See the listings for businesses operated by the Starks in the Colorado State Business Directory, 1916-1935 (Denver: The Gazeteer Publishing Co.)

[72]Smith, 123-124.

[73]Ward, 36.

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